

March 16, 2000

*(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)*

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: We're going to open up for questions. I'm going to ask Bob Seiple to begin, and go around the table, skipping Laila in the first round to pick up later. Again, if you have questions you would like to ask, please raise your hand. Our staff will pass out cards to you. You can write them down, and Steve will process them as he has already done so. Ambassador Seiple.

AMBASSADOR SEIPLE: Specific question for Mickey, and largely general question. You mentioned the ordination of the six priests in January. We had just gotten the first blush back that there's something that came about buyer's remorse going on -- I'll use the phrase "buyer's remorse," a deep level of grieving on the part of what they allowed to have happened. And my specific question would be, do you have any information, any additional information, of what has happened since that ordination? This is the first report we have seen.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Excuse me one second. Let me ask a logistics question. Larry.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Do we have microphones? People could sit at their seats here -- they could remain at their seats to answer the questions.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes. Go ahead and speak.

MS. SPIEGEL: No specific information or additional information of Chinese government was planning more ordinations. So far today that hasn't occurred; and whether that plays into the situation or at the moment, I cannot be sure. That information is often -- takes some time to find out about and to analyze. So I can't really give you any more specific information at this point. Sorry.

AMBASSADOR SEIPLE: Just to make note of the fact that the information has just begun to trickle out that there's a number of problems now surfacing with that ordination. And of course, it will have a profound effect ultimately with Chinese relationship with the Vatican.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Something perhaps our next panel, some of the folks, will be able to pick up on that.

AMBASSADOR SEIPLE: Just a more general question. Mr. Wei, you mentioned since '49, China trying to squash human rights in general, religious freedom specifically, and has done that essentially with a great deal of intentionality since '49. You mentioned that more has to be done with the business community towards human rights. With the 50-year celebration that took place in October, a lot of the business, international business was brought from America where there as a point in celebration, at the same time when all of these incidents that you've reported take place in the business community by and large has been uniformly quiet, not a peep. I'm assuming the business community would want to be more part of the -- to play a role in terms of fighting for human rights, but perhaps don't know how. My question is how do you bring the business community alongside of the human rights activists, workers, laborers, so that a larger statement can be made in a country that has decided to pick and choose? China seems to have chosen; the rest of the world in one sense, seems to have gone along with it. How do we break that cycle?

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

MR. WEI: To bring a total harmony between these two gulfs are not very easy. Every entrepreneur or businessman has his own moral standard and religious beliefs.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: May I interrupt for a moment.

MR. WEI: For you to --

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Mr. Wei, could I ask if you would -- we're having trouble with the microphone. Thank you.

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

MR. WEI: To bring these two in perfect coordination is not possible at this time because they permit you to conduct business along their policy and their purpose. And when there is a conflict, it is very hard to reconcile the difference. However, I have a personal suggestion that will slightly put some kind of coordination. First of all, inside your business or enterprise you establish in China, you may practice your own company policy, your own personal moral belief, and use that requirement of your employee. And therefore, you are only exercising and doing certain practice using a restrictive group, which will not conflict openly with the Chinese policy in general.

So we -- the Chinese law book says one thing, the practice is another. So they do tolerate such discrepancy; and in your domain, you practice your own without openly contradicting them, in general, they will tolerate that to exist. So you in a restrictive sense practice your own religious and moral belief; and on the other side, you are giving them a subtle challenge of their disrespect of law.

Another thing I have advised that U.S. businessmen is don't be a mouthpiece back home for the Chinese policy in China. You really don't understand the sophistication and the complexity of the Communist system, so don't be a promoter of that. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SEIPLE: Thank you very much.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Elliott Abrams.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Let me ask Mr. Wei to stay there because I want to ask another question of you first, and then perhaps the others. What we do hear about is disputes within the party leadership over all sorts of things, for example, over economic policy. We believe that there are disputes; we know of disputes about policy toward religion. Is it a faction within the party that would like to liberalize the policy?

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

MR. WEI: Yes, there is such a different, you know, thing existing. However, because of the present political system, the format of expression is different. Now, one it says that we feel that the measure taken against the Falun Gong is overreacting; we shouldn't do such severe clampdown. This might be a good thing. You may say, "You're overreacting. You should do a due process," but you will not hear a saying "Falun Gong is legitimate. They have a right to exist." And such difference in opinion will not be allowed to air publicly.

Now, overreacting or too severe a punishment, that might be a reason that such voice can be heard. And the two reasons that such voice can be heard, one is there is indeed such dissenting voice in the Chinese public. The people do feel that this is overreaction, and so some political leader voice that opinion, has certain ground; and secondly, there are dissenting voice and strong feelings of the Chinese overreaction by the overseas people. So we urge the group of overseas to strongly voice your concern, so that the government's dissenting voice can be heard.

On the contrary, if let's say your political leaders, your religious leader, made a visit to China, come back and say, "Oh, they are great. They have religious freedom. Everything is fine and dandy," and in that way, Le Pong would say, "We don't have to do anything more. They already agree with us."

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Thank you. Dr. Kazemzadeh.

DR. KAZEMZADEH: I would like to ask Mr. Wei what he thinks about the claims that have been made by Chinese leaders as well as leaders from some other countries such as Burma and Iran, that human rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are culture bound, they are the product of the Western philosophy and do not apply elsewhere. Is that a prevailing view among the Chinese?

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

MR. WEI: I'm not familiar with the surrounding culture. However, to tolerate the religious freedom and to respect different religions to exist in China, we have that permission for the past 2000 years. And the Communist policy in the extent, the so-called their interpretation of human rights and religious belief is really not Chinese. It has nothing to do with Chinese culture.

If there's anything to do, it is really coming from the Western culture. So don't blame to the Chinese people. It is Western culture that is important to have this oppression. Thank you.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Thank you. I'll give you the opportunity for the others to get in on some of this too, but -- Justice Smith.

JUSTICE SMITH: My question is addressed to Mr. Lu. One of the basic tenets of international law is that one nation does not interfere in the internal affairs of another nation. All of us abide by that basic principle. A great exception happens when we are concerned with basic human rights. That includes our concern with religious freedom.

When we in the Western world react or criticize China, the government representatives will say, "China is not the United States. China's constitution is not the same as the United States' Constitution. You do not understand China. China has many different minority groups. China has an entirely different political system. China has more people than anywhere else in the world. And China has more languages than any other nation in the world." When we receive a response like that, how do you think a group like our Commission can be effective in breaking through that wall of resistance?

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

MR. LU: Well, first of all, human rights is universal. That is the reason, it is universal -- that is the reason China choose to sign the two U.N. conventions, and it is because of that we cannot say that the sovereignty is over human rights. It is the other way around. And it is because of that we feel that you can talk to the China by saying, "Don't use that argument because those argument, we override that."

Now, one of the basic human rights the Chinese often cite is the right of survival -- a right of survival, and they claim that very much. But look at the law passed last October by M.P.C. Ever since that law passed, there are Falun Gong members lost their life, and they lost the right to survive. And the reason is not that they violated the law. The reason is that in the torture by the security people that torture them to death, and therefore it violates the right of survival for these members.

So I think the Commission can do is pay attention to express concern of those violent, flagrant violations of the basic human rights. Even they have acknowledged that right should exist in China; and we constantly voice that concern, such great objection to that, and that's the only way we can improve the condition in China.

Two of the radio station present here have over 50 million audience in China, and I think they can bring the message to the Chinese audience by saying "Even China accept that the basic human rights is higher than sovereignty." And it is that we need to protect, and itis constant expression of that will bring a change eventually.

JUSTICE SMITH: Thank you, sir.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Dr. Al-Marayati, do you have anything else you want to ask?

DR. AL-MARAYATI: Not at this time.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: We need to bring this panel to a close, but let me do so by -- I have looked at the questions that have come from the audience. Several of them represent my own. I want to ask you briefly to respond to a group of questions. You can pick whichever you want. I am going to ask each of you to respond.

The first is to Mr. Wei and Mr. Lu. What do you believe the U.S. Congress should do about permitting normal trade relations with China? You know that this is a decision we must make soon. We would like your recommendation on this. We heard Ms. Spiegel on this issue. Relating to that is, does it help the struggle for religious freedom, political prisoners, when there is outspoken activity here in the United States and elsewhere, or does it harm them?

The other piece of this is, what can U.S. consumers do to promote religious freedom? Should U.S. consumers buy or not buy Chinese products? You don't have to answer each of them, and I have to ask you to answer -- to respond briefly. But I would like to give you each a chance, as we close this panel, to respond.

Mr. Wei, you want to begin?

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

MR. WEI: I've been asked this question most often in Washington and in Europe. Now, Europeans and Americans said, "Since we have to do this year after year, why don't we just do it permanently to save us trouble?" I told them, I said, "That's not advisable, because just like you have to periodically renew your driver's license to make sure you are driveable, driveability is okay, likewise the trade relations review should be there and subject to periodic review."

I think the annual review of trade relation, the human rights situation is a pressure to China government. And I think a constant pressure is good. And I think this annual review is a constant reminder and also a weapon, good excuse, for the mild sector who are in favor of political freedom and human rights issues to convince the small factions, say, "You have to do something because otherwise we're constantly getting those pressure."

And because the foreign trade is very important to the Chinese economy and Chinese government pay attention to the betterment or degradation of such trade agreements, that is why we have the bargaining power. And I think the worst thing is, taking my example as an illustration, is to issue a permanent driver's license even though that guy's house is deteriorating.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: I take it from what I read in your writings you believe it is helpful to the political prisoners and those fighting for human rights to have supporters in the United States speak out forcefully and publicly?

(The following was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

MR. WEI: And it's very effective, most effective, and it will help those factions in the Chinese political struggle to bring closer relation to the western part. And as a political prisoner, I can give you a personal experience that I had. Every time you have more concern about the political prisoners, I get better treatment. And so that is a personal testimony. Thank you.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Ms. Spiegel, anything to add on those issues from what you said earlier? Why don't you take --

MS. SPIEGEL: I've already said how we feel about, sorry, normal trade relations. But I would like to talk about this outspoken activity on behalf of political prisoners. First of all, I think it is very important that we all understand that that is up to the family of political prisoners. We never ever, should take it upon ourselves to decide whether there should or should not be public activity on the part of any person, ever.

Second of all, I think it needs to be pointed out that the numbers of political prisoners that you can advocate on behalf of this is, of course, limited by resources, by time, and by everything else; so that you get a set of high-profile political prisoners who may in fact be released when the Chinese government wants something.

And that is usually a problem of what we have often called "Passive Politique."



You get somebody released -- and you certainly don't want people sitting in jail, please don't misunderstand me on that point -- but on the other hand, these people get used to further what the Chinese government wants to trade, offer them. And somebody else winds up in jail, and the next one, sort of on the list.

You also have a situation here where many of these people, and Mr. Wei is one of them, they are in exile. They are not free to stay in their own countries and to continue their activities.

Now, one of the things that we have been doing is -- to further this issue is to think about groups of political prisoners so that -- we're working very hard right now on trying to find ways to change the system of reeducation through labor, for instance, which would not only apply to political prisoners but to many other groups of prisoners in China. And, of course, we have been pushing for a review of those who are sentenced for counterrevolutionary offenses, and any counterrevolution is no longer in the Chinese legal code. There are ways of dealing with that issue that could result in an amnesty for those political prisoners. So those are the kinds we consider doing rather than working prisoner by prisoner.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Thank you very much. Mr. Lu, you have the final word.

MR. LU: (IN ENGLISH) I think in my opinion W.T.O. more investment cannot automatically can change investment in Shanghai, such they allow you in Shanghai. Shanghai is become a -- grew very fast, arose. Anybody can come to invest in Shanghai. First Shanghai is, it is very bad there. So much persecution in Shanghai, and put in education and labor camps, such that one week ago they are putting the Christians in education camps.

So I think it cannot, yet, automatically change it. I think it may be given the W.T.O. to China, maybe this two or three years can really, human rights, almost. Because, more Christians cannot find jobs. Farmers cannot find jobs. So it has made the society more unstable so the Communist party can maybe make a particular policy to more crackdowns. So I think maybe human rights can be, at most maybe at least in five years; but thinking unless there is very different opinions even in this committee, because you say if some company, American company investing in China, you got to put it into internet.

Internet is really helpful at the moment, I think so. Telecommunications very helpful. The

market such that twenty years ago WeiJingSing and Guy Samuels maybe with one click, one mouse click this information come out there. By now you say surely Guy Samuels, half a year half an hour, I get the information. People say and that say again code, this in this case telecommunications Internet is very helpful in the market.

Now, you got ten million people using the internet in China. Maybe NWNCN double the people use this. So I really think this can happen in China. My opinion cannot automatically change much richer, but maybe in the future such an Internet and the telecommunications can help democracy in China.

Thank you very much.